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Virtue is a Great Moral Good

§1. Introduction

According to Aristotelian virtue ethicists, virtue is a great moral good that contributes to, but cannot be reduced to, an agent's welfare. In addition, they hold that the value of virtue is different from, and in some sense greater than, the agent-neutral intrinsic goodness that consequentialists attribute to states of affair. According to Thomas Hurka (1998, 2001, 2010), these fundamental Aristotelian views are indefensible. He denies that virtue should be given lexical priority over other goods, denies that virtue has some kind of moral or ethical goodness that both differs from agent-neutral goodness and grounds a strong claim about virtue's greatness, and argues that virtuous and vicious attitudes are always less agent-neutrally valuable than their objects.

In this paper, I rebuff Hurka's skepticism and identify an Aristotelian view that stands fast in the face of his criticisms. I argue that while Hurka's skeptical views are unwarranted, Aristotelians can sharpen their thinking by engaging with them. My discussion proceeds as follows. First, in section 2, I show that Hurka's negative claim - that virtuous attitudes are always less agent-neutrally valuable than their objects - rests on a one-sided diet of examples. I argue that to accommodate intuitions that conflict with his view we should reject his negative principle and at least admit that virtue is sometimes as valuable (from the point of view of the universe) as its object. This result is non-trivial but only clears the way for a positive defense of virtue's greatness. In the remainder of the paper I argue that virtue's great value is not best understood in an consequentialist framework that grounds all claims about

value in claims about what makes states of affair agent-neutrally better or worse. Specifically, I argue that virtue has a distinctive, authoritative moral value, which grounds compelling *agent-relative* reasons for action; I argue that facts about virtue and vice ground rational constraints on the promotion of agent-neutral goodness.

I begin making this positive case in section 3, by addressing Hurka's skepticism about virtue and vice having some kind of moral or ethical value that differs from agent-neutral intrinsic value. Despite explicitly defending this skeptical view in several places, Hurka himself tacitly concedes that *vice* has a type of agent-relative value that differs from the agent-neutral value that pleases standard consequentialists. Building on this admission, I argue that Hurka's concerns about virtue's having similar agent-relative value are unfounded and that his skepticism about virtue and vice having more than agent-neutral value is therefore unwarranted. In section 4, I turn to questions about whether the (agent-relative) value of virtue is great. I quickly survey the main claims about virtue's greatness that Hurka rejects and then introduce one of my own: vice has an agent-relative value that sometimes provides agents with compelling reason to refrain from promoting the best outcome or state of affairs from an agent-neutral point of view. Analogously, I argue that virtue is a great good because it has an agent-relative form of moral goodness that grounds aretaic rational constraints on the promotion of consequentialist intrinsic goodness.

§2. Hurka's Negative Principle

Our first topic is Hurka's negative claim about virtue, which I label 'VS' for 'Virtue's Smallness'. This is basically the final handful of dirt he hopes to throw on the grave of virtue's greatness:

(VS) The degree of intrinsic agent-neutral goodness or evil of an attitude to x is always less than the degree of goodness or evil of x.[1]

On Hurka's view, VS is a thesis about virtue and vice because he holds that virtue and vice are constituted by higher-level attitudes towards lower-level goods. Specifically, Hurka largely focuses on a basic recursive account of virtue with three elements. To begin, we identify a base-level list of things that are intrinsically and agent-neutrally good and bad – roughly, things that makes states of affair better or worse from the point of view of the universe. For example, Hurka suggests that pleasure, knowledge, and achievement are intrinsically good, while pain, false belief, and failure are intrinsically bad.[2] Next, we define virtue as love of the good or hatred of the bad and define vice as love of the bad or hatred of the good, where 'love' and 'hate' are used to encompass a wide and diverse range or pro and con attitudes (preference, promotion, avoidance, etc). Last, but not least, we make the account recursive by stipulating that virtuous and vicious attitudes (towards goods and bads) are themselves good and bad; so there are higher order forms of virtue and vice, constituted by third and higher order attitudes. In chapters 1-5 of Virtue, Value, and Vice, Hurka insightfully develops this basic recursive approach and shows how powerful it is, but for our purposes, this simple description will do just fine. The main points to bear in mind are that within the basic recursive framework, VS entails that virtue and vice are always less valuable than their objects and that this is a claim about agent-neutral value.

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[1] Hurka hedges VS to allow that sometimes an attitude towards a trivial good or bad is more good or bad than its object, but I leave this (plausible) tweak aside because it is irrelevant to my argument.

[2] As Hurka (2009: 4-7) mentions there are various views that one could adopt about how facts about agent-neutral value bear on facts about what individual agents have reason to do or ought to do, and about what attitudes, emotions, or feelings they make fit, but I will follow his practice of assuming (a) that it is pro tanto fitting for impartial spectators to be pleased by agent-neutral good and saddened by agent-neutral bad and (b) that impartial spectators ought to choose the agent-neutrally best state of affairs when there is a choice to be made.

In this section, my aim is to show that, when it is interpreted in the basic framework, VS is false.[3] To begin, we can usefully bring to mind two main cases that Hurka gives to support VS. To ground the virtuous attitude aspect of VS, he gives us

> **Teacher**. Imagine that a teacher works to develop knowledge in a student from a benevolent desire for the student's knowledge, and that as a result the student acquires knowledge. If you learn of these facts, which should you be more pleased by, the student's knowledge or the teacher's virtuous pursuit of knowledge? Surely you should be more pleased by the student's knowledge; it is the point of the exercise. Or imagine that you can produce only one of these types of good but not both. Right now an uncaring teacher is teaching using ineffective methods, so her student is not acquiring knowledge. You can either change the teacher's attitude while leaving her methods unchanged or change her methods but not her attitude. Surely in this case it is best to change the teacher's methods, so the student acquires knowledge. (Hurka, 2008: 137-8)

And to support the vicious attitude aspect he gives us

> **Torturer.** If a torturer is causing a victim intense pain while taking sadistic pleasure in that pain, you should be more saddened by the pain than by the sadism. And if you can either stop the torturer's pleasure while leaving his machine running or secretly disconnect his machine, you should disconnect the machine. (Hurka, 2008: 137-8)

Now although these cases no doubt tempt us to accept VS, we should reflect a bit before taking the leap. In particular we need to think about more cases to make sure we are not living on a one-sided diet of examples. Consider, for example, how the first argument would run if it were applied to a case involving a substantive personal relationship:

> **Friends.** Imagine that, out of friendly concern, a friend empathizes with a suffering friend and succeeds in comforting him. If you learn of these facts, which should you be more pleased by, the reduction in suffering or the friend's virtuous response to his friend's plight? Surely you should be more pleased by reduction in suffering; it is the point of the friend's response. Or imagine that you can produce only one of these types of good but not both. Right now an instrumentally motivated "friend" does not really care about the friend's suffering and is ineffective at comforting him, so the friend is in bad shape. You can either change the friend's attitude while leaving his effectiveness unchanged or change her effectiveness but not her attitude. Surely in

[3] I think VS is also false in Hurka's modified framework that recognizes the existence of agent-relative value. I discuss this framework in section 2, but don't get into questions about why VS is false in it. Although thinking about how to assess VS in that framework would raise interesting questions for Hurka about how to balance the reasons generated by agent-neutral and agent-relative values, those issues are orthogonal to my topic here.

this case it is best to change the friend's effectiveness, so the person actually feels comforted.

Surely, though, we should not be so sure.[4] Next, consider the following analogue to Hurka's vicious attitude case:

> **Dad.** If your elderly self-hating father is glad that he has severe back pain, you should be more saddened by the pain than by the masochism. And if you can either stop your father from being glad he is in pain, or remove his back pain but leave him wishing it would come back, you should do the latter.

Here again, Hurka's confident conclusions are overdrawn. At minimum, I think we should endorse the following more moderate conclusions (assuming you are an impartial spectator):

> **Impartial Rational Leeway**: You have at least as much reason to choose making a friend caring but ineffective as you do to choose making a friend effective but fake.
>
> **Impartial Affective Leeway**: There is nothing inappropriate about your being just as pleased by a friend being caring but ineffective as his being effective but fake.

Now, assuming that these are true, what should we conclude?

It is tempting to conclude, straightaway, that VS is false and that it is false because virtue is sometimes more valuable than its object. For example, compare a world with uncaring but effective friends and a world with caring but ineffective ones. Given that you have rational leeway to choose the latter world over the former one, you might conclude that friendly compassion must be at least as good as the suffering to which it responds is bad.

But here again, we need to slow down before we leap; we cannot move so easily from premises about impartial leeway to conclusions about the specific facts about agent-neutral value that ground it. To see why, consider a related case that Hurka discusses:

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[4] This reaction only gains force when we move from an uncaring friend to a malicious but accidentally helpful "friend".

> If you feel compassion for a friend's pain, your compassion is good and makes the overall situation better than if you didn't care about her pain. But it can't be more good than her pain is evil. It can't be better for there to be pain and compassion for that pain than for there to be no pain and no compassion; the compassion must be the lesser value. (Hurka, 2013: 134)

Hurka is onto something here. The world does not become a better place when people with good friends start suffering.[5] So, unless the value of the organic whole of friendly compassion for pain is more bad than the sum of the value of its parts, we should agree with Hurka that friendly compassion is not more absolutely good than its object is bad.[6] Let's grant that. Once it is granted, however, we are left wondering how to justify the claim that there is no rational compulsion for you to choose making the friend effective but fake over making him caring but ineffective. More generally, how can we retain our claims about impartial leeway while admitting that virtuous responses to evils are never more good than their objects are bad?

To see the way to a solution, we should distinguish four sub-claims that are packed into VS:

(Virtue B) Virtuous attitudes towards evils are always less good than their objects are bad.

(Vice B) Vicious attitudes towards evils are always less bad than their objects.

(Virtue G) Virtuous attitudes towards goods are always less good than their objects.

(Vice G) Vicious attitudes towards goods are always less bad than their objects are good.

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[5] Cf. Hurka on the problem of evil: "...compassion is less good than the pain it cares about is evil, so a God who created pain in order to allow compassion would be creating more evil than good." (Hurka 2013: 135) It is worth noting in this context that on Hurka's own view a large number of compassionate responses can outweigh the badness of any one person's suffering, so he has to think that the world gets better when celebrities suffer and their numerous fans feel compassion in response. By extension, it seems that God, on Hurka's account, would have good reason to bring about celebrity suffering, if not the suffering of less popular mortals.

[6] More specifically, to avoid Hurka's claim about compassion and pain while denying that the world gets better we would need to hold that the whole is bad despite the sum of the parts being good.

Given our most recent conclusion (i.e. that friendly compassion is not more agent-neutrally good than its object), we should at least endorse a slightly weakened version of Virtue B, namely the claim that virtuous responses to evils are never more good than their objects are bad. That principle can explain, for example, why the world is not made better by an increase in the number of evils to which the virtuous aptly respond. But the main point now is that we can embrace Virtue B or its slightly weaker cousin, and still reject another part of VS.

I suggest we reject Vice B and hold that vicious attitudes towards evils are sometimes more bad than their objects. To preserve symmetry, we might also accept Virtue B and reject Virtue G but in order to avoid unnecessary complications I will just focus on Vice B and the fact that by rejecting it we open up space to justify our impartial leeway in the Friends and Dad cases. First, we can hold that there is no rational compulsion for you to choose making friends effective but fake over making them caring but ineffective because the vice of cold-heartedness in a friend is sometimes worse than the badness of the pain he would prevent. So although friendly compassion is never more good than the suffering to which it responds is evil, the heartlessness of a fake friend can be more bad than the suffering to which he is indifferent.

Second, if Vice B is false, then we can posit evaluative grounds for affective leeway, i.e. for being just as saddened by a vicious attitude towards some evil as we are by the evil itself. Consider the self-hating father who is glad he is in back pain. In this case, I am more saddened by his joy at his own suffering than by his back pain. Assuming we reject Vice B, we can hold that this reaction is apt because his sadism is more agent-neutrally bad than his pain.

In conclusion, I have argued that we should reject Hurka's negative claim VS because it undercuts the plausible idea that we have impartial leeway in cases such as Friends and Dad. I have not settled all the relevant questions about what parts of VS to reject but have suggested that we should at least reject Vice B and that for symmetry's sake we might consider rejecting Virtue G as well. Regardless of how these matters work out, however, I think this much is clear: Hurka's negative principle about virtue's smallness is quite counter-intuitive and therefore not something that Aristotelians need to accept.

§3. Virtue's Special Moral Value

So far we have established that Hurka's negative principle regarding virtue's small agent-neutral value is counter-intuitive and that to avoid all relevant counter-intuitive commitments we have to be careful about which part of VS we reject. But even if Hurka has to concede that his negative claim about virtue's small value is false, that merely clears the ground for a positive defense of virtue's greatness. It merely clears the ground because neither Hurka's skepticism about the theoretical need to ascribe some kind of special moral or ethical value to virtue nor his attack on various possible interpretations of the greatness of virtue's value hinges on the truth of the negative principle I have criticized. So to begin a positive defense of virtue's great moral value, we now leave VS aside and turn to Hurka's doubts about virtue having a special kind of value. In section 3 we will turn to the claim about greatness.

In *Virtue, Vice and Value*, Hurka explicitly expresses skepticism about the theoretical need to ascribe some kind of special moral or ethical value to virtue in several places, but the main one is in chapter 2. In 2.2, he argues that, within the confines of his basic agent-neutral framework, we can certainly make a *verbal* distinction between the "moral" value of virtues

and vices and the "non-moral" value of base-level agent-neutral goods. 'Moral value', on this view, refers to the normal kind of intrinsic, agent-neutral value that we ascribe to things like pleasure, pain, and beauty, but it only applies to agent-neutral value that happens to be enjoyed by an attitude of the sort picked out by the recursive account. So on this verbal view, although there is nothing special about the kind of value to which 'moral value' refers, we can truly claim that virtue and vice have moral value and disvalue and rightly deny that pleasure, pain, and other base-level items are morally good and bad.

Having introduced this verbal view, Hurka notes that some other philosophers (presumably including many Aristotelians) will object and contend that we need a more substantive view, which attributes a new kind of value to virtue and vice. In response, Hurka rhetorically asks, "why complicate the metaphysics of value?" (Hurka, 2008: 51) What theoretical benefits will we gain, he wants to know, by holding that virtue and vice have some sort of moral or ethical value that differs from consequentialist friendly agent-neutral value?

In chapter 5, which is devoted to attacking virtue's greatness, Hurka re-affirms and builds on this skepticism about the theoretical need to posit substantive moral value. First, he claims that there is, "no need to treat moral goodness as a distinct property," from intrinsic goodness because we can adopt the aforementioned verbal view of the distinction between moral and non-moral good. Second, he asserts that, "the claim that virtue alone is morally good supports no substantive view about virtue's comparative worth." (Hurka, 2008:133) Now Hurka is surely right that if we adopt the verbal view then claims about virtue's morally goodness will not support any substantive claims about virtue's greatness; but his argument is unsound because there actually are strong theoretical reasons to posit a substantive type of moral value and attribute it to virtue. In fact, near the end of his book, Hurka himself ironically recognizes the need to complicate our metaphysics of value in order to get a

recursive theory that conforms with common sense. Specifically, after devoting 6 chapters to his agent-neutral recursive account of virtue and one to his attack on virtue's greatness, Hurka turns, in chapter 7, to a modified recursive framework that makes use of claims about agent-relative value in addition to ones about agent-neutral value, and he points out several ways that this modified framework will yield more intuitive results than a basic, purely agent-neutral one.

The core problem with the basic agent-neutral account is that it can't explain why it is virtuous to be partial or why it is virtuous to be specially concerns about the effects of one's agency and one's degree of virtue or vice. Consider, first, virtue's partiality. From the point of the view of the universe, your mother's suffering is no more bad than a stranger's so on the basic model virtue would presumably require you to feel just as bad about the one as the other, and to have no preference about whose suffering gets relieved first. But impartial attitudes of this sort will strike many as inhumane and vicious. To avoid this result, Hurka suggests we adopt a modified recursive framework that builds facts about agent-relative value to the base list of goods and then defines virtue as apt responsiveness to both agent-relative and agent-neutral value.[7] For example, although your mother's shocking recovery from cancer is no more agent-neutrally good than a similar recovery enjoyed by a stranger in Peru, it would be virtuous for you to be more cheered by your mother's recovery than the stranger's and perhaps vicious to respond impartially. On the modified account, we can explain this by appeal to the facts that your mom or her recovery is more agent-relatively valuable (e.g. valuable from your point of view) than the stranger's recovery and that virtue involves responsiveness to that comparative evaluative fact. Similarly, the modified recursive account can explain intuitive assumptions about how a virtuous friend acts and

[7] Hurka's general aim is to develop a consequentialist account that attributes intrinsic value to virtue, so attempts to save the basic account by appeal to the instrumental value of partial attitudes will not serve his purpose.

reacts. If your friend is hurt in a football brawl, it would be virtuous or certainly not vicious for you to care more about his injury than a stranger's and, other things being equal, to help him before someone else.

Second, consider virtue's intuitive self-focus. From the point of the view of the universe, good and bad states of affair that result from your agency, whether intentional, unintentional, virtuous, or vicious, are not made better or worse by their manner of production. And although your virtuous and vicious agency or character are themselves good and bad from the point of the view of the universe, they are no better or worse than the virtue and vice exhibited or harbored by other agents. So on the basic recursive account a virtuous person would not feel worse about her own vicious character and actions or the harms that result from her agency, than about other's vicious character and actions or the harms that they bring about. This is, of course, deeply counter-intuitive, and Hurka points out that by ascribing more agent-relative value to our own character and causal relation to harms than to others' we can build a modified view that is more in line with common sense. Given this view, but not the basic one, we can explain why it is virtuous for someone to feel agent-regret or remorse when he faultlessly causes the death of a child who runs in the street and virtuous for you to refuse a job that will vastly improve other's good or degree of virtue but also lead you into a deep pit of vice (Hurka, 2008:204-206).

The first, obvious thing to say about Hurka's case for the modified recursive framework is that it undermines his earlier suggestion that the verbal view of moral value is appealing. Contrary to what he suggests in chapters 2 and 5, there *is* theoretical pressure to complicate the metaphysics of value in order to explain virtue's value. So there is at least room to pursue the view that virtue is a great good because of its special moral value. But before turning to questions about virtue's greatness, I want to make two more points about the agent-relativity of virtue and vice.

First, I think we should make a distinction, which Hurka does not, between the agent-relative value of being a virtuous or vicious person (or, e.g., having a reliable virtue trait such as courage) and the value of embodying virtue or vice in a specific activity or act and of thereby treating someone virtuously or viciously. In Hurka's framework we can understand this as a three-way distinction between the value of an agent's virtuous disposition, the value of the virtuous attitudes that are embodied in her actions, and the value of the virtuous ways of relating to others that these actions make possible. Once we make these distinctions, we can also expand on Hurka's views about virtue's intuitive self-focus. He plausibly suggests (i) that a virtuous agent may avoid stinking into vice even if, to avoid that, she must refrain from helping some others become more virtuous, and (ii) that this is virtuous because one's own vice is more agent-relatively bad than others and virtue tracks agent-relative value, not just agent-neutral value. We can now add that a virtuous agent may choose to perform virtuous actions because she will thereby embody a virtuous attitude that enables her to relate to another person in a virtuous way, and that she may choose to do this even if that choice will lead to others acting less virtuously or even viciously. We can explain this in Hurka's framework by noting that one's own virtuous and vicious attitudes and one's own virtuous or vicious ways of relating to others can have more agent-relative value than others' attitudes and ways of relating.

For example, consider Rashid, who just watched his son's team bungle the state football championship. It would be vicious of Rashid to mock his son's poor play on the soccer field and to thereby humiliate him in front of his friends. It would be shameful for him to treat his son that way and virtue requires that he be against doing that. Now even if Rashid sees that he could stop two other mean dads from humiliating their sons by humiliating his own, his action would still be vicious and shameful. And this is explicable within Hurka's framework if we recognize that from Rashid's point of view it is worse for

him to humiliate his son than it is for one of the mean dad's to humiliate his. So, as this illustrates, vice, vicious attitudes, and vicious ways of relating to others each have a special type of agent-relative disvalue; one that makes it virtuous for agent's to refrain from promoting the best state of affairs or most agent-neutral value.

This clearly suggests a way to understand why vice's special moral (dis)value could be said to be great – it grounds rational constraints on the promotion of agent-neutral value. But before moving on to that topic, I want to note and rebuff Hurka's view that while vice has agent-relative dimensions of the sorts we have discussed, the same cannot be said of virtue. Specifically, he holds (a) that while it is virtuous to feel bad about harms we faultlessly bring about the same cannot be said about benefits we faultlessly bring about and (b) that while it is sometimes virtuous to hate or oppose your own vice more than others, it is not virtuous to love or promote your own virtue more than others. I will push back against both claims.

Hurka's first claim is that while agents should feel especially bad about harms they unintentionally and faultlessly bring about (and the fact that they bring them about), the same is not true of goods. So the person who faultlessly causes the death of a child should feel more bad about that death and his causal role in bringing it about than about the death and killing of some unrelated child with whom he has never interacted. When it comes to meritless benefiting cases, however, Hurka thinks things are very different. He writes: "Imagine that a person causes some benefit accidentally, in a way that reflects no merit on his part. I see no reason why he should be specially pleased by this benefit, as against others he did not cause; such pleasure seems even morally suspect." (Hurka, 2008: 205)

Personally, I don't share Hurka's intuition about the pleasure being morally suspect, but that may be because we are thinking about different kinds of cases. Imagine, for example, that you find a lost puppy and have to bring her to work because she can't say at your apartment. The puppy is very cute and cheers up various co-workers, who have been

beaten down by the impersonal office environment. Now suppose you overhear your co-worker saying he has been happier at work lately. You should be happy to hear that. Next you overhear the co-worker saying she is happier because you keep bringing your cute and cuddly puppy in. Would it really be morally suspect to smile a bit wider on hearing this news or to be pleased that you were causally responsible for your co-worker's hedonic uptick? I can't see that it would be myself.

In any case, I want to now move on to Hurka's more important contention that while it might be virtuous to care more about and do more to avoid one's own vice than others', the same is not true of virtue. He makes several points here, but I want to hone in on his contention that, "taking more pleasure in one's own benevolence or courage [than in another person's] seems disproportionate and an objectionable form of moral pride." (206) This claim is especially important because it connected with one of his main objections to traditional Aristotelian virtue ethics -namely that Aristotle admires the self-consciously virtuous agent and that if one self-consciously values one's virtue then one is morally self-indulgent or narcissistic.

Now I am willing to grant that Hurka's worries about moral pride and self-indulgence are sound if they are just worries about agents who especially love or value their own virtuous character or disposition. I grant that a person who is more pleased that she is generally kind to the homeless than that a stranger is kind to them may exhibit an off-putting form of moral pride. But if we bring to mind the distinctions between personal virtue, virtuous attitudes, and virtuous ways of relating to others, we can see that there is still room to approve of agents who value their own virtue. Consider, for example, a mother who takes more pleasure in compassionately comforting her own son than she does in seeing a stranger comfort his son. Or consider a case involving a choice, rather than just pleasure. Take a mother who can either compassionately comfort her son or let a stranger comfort him.

Apparently Hurka would convict the mother who chooses to compassionately comfort her son herself of moral pride; but that is surely not right. This is a clear case in which it is virtuous to prefer bringing about a good through one's own virtuous agency. More generally, I believe that it is often virtuous to choose an action because one knows one will perform it virtuously and thereby relate to another person in virtuous fashion. In fact, as the child case suggests, we sometimes owe it another to treat him virtuously, and others may sometimes aptly hold us responsible for the virtuous or vicious ways in which we relate to them.[8]

§4. Virtue's Greatness

We have seen that Hurka himself (tacitly) admits that virtue has a special agent-relative value and that it involves responding to agent-relative value as well. So his argument that there is, "no need to treat moral goodness as a distinct property," from intrinsic goodness because we can adopt the verbal view of the distinction between moral and non-moral good is untenable. The resulting view would be deeply counter-intuitive. Perhaps Hurka would accept this point and even the additional claims about virtue's agent-relative value that I have just made. He might accept, for example, that it is virtuous to value one's virtuous ways of relating to others, and only morally self-indulgent to value one's degree of personal virtue or be especially pleased by the virtue of one's disposition. But he could presumably accept all of my claims so far and still question virtue's greatness. He could grant that virtue's moral value is different in kind than the agent-neutral value that makes states of affair pleasing to

[8] This last point suggests that Hurka's modified teleological framework needs more fundamental amendment. The idea that we owe it to others to treat them virtuously suggests that we have second-personal reasons to treat them virtuously and that the moral goodness of virtue is therefore not reducible to a form of agent-relative value. I think this is true, and that an Aristotelian can accommodate the relevant facts by building a second-personal account of social morality into her theory of moral motivation. For discussion of this possibility, see Cokelet (2015).

good impartial observers and still hold that, "the claim that virtue alone is morally good supports no substantive view about virtue's comparative worth." (Hurka, 2008: 133)

In this final section, I will attempt to identify a plausible claim about virtue's greatness that stands fast in the face of this imagined response. My goal is to identify a historically significant thesis of this sort that one could sensibly defend, not to conclusively defend any specific view. Hurka's overall attitude seems to be that virtue has no substantively interesting sort of moral value and there is no claim about virtue's greatness that is substantive and worth taking seriously. So I will view it as a victory if I can end by showing that virtue does have a special kind of moral value and that that value could sensibly be thought to ground a substantive claim about greatness.

To begin, let me introduce, but set aside, a plausible thesis about virtue's prudential value:

> **Beneficial Virtue:** Virtue is among the best things for us and it is also a necessary, normatively grounding, component of various relationships and activities that are among the best things for us.

I do think this is an interesting positive thesis about virtue's value, but I will set it aside because I believe Hurka would endorse it and I also worry that this thesis is too moderate to count as a substantive claim about virtue being an especially great good.

Next, I will mention some specific strong theses that Hurka identifies and reasonably rejects. First, like Hurka, I think we should reject John Henry Newman's view that, "it would be better if the whole human race died "in extremest agnony" than if one person committed on venial sin," along with the related claim that virtuous attitudes are infinitely more good than base-level goods such as pleasure and pain. Second, I agree with Hurka that we should reject analogous claims about the prudential value of virtue. We should reject both the Stoic view that non-aretaic goods and bads are prudentially indifferent, i.e. neither good nor bad for us, and the (only slightly more plausible) view that virtue and vice are infinitely more

prudentially valuable than non-aretaic goods and bads. As Hurka suggests this would drive us to say that, "a virtuous person who suffers excruciating agony has an overwhelmingly good life, one with only an infinitesimally small element of evil...if he were slightly less virtuous but enjoyed ecstasy his life would be overwhelmingly worse." (Hurka, 2008: 241)

Now although I agree we should reject the Stoic views about prudential value, I also think that we can identify a sensible but still substantive alternative by looking at a specific Stoic argument for the (hard to swallow) lexical view about virtue's prudential importance. I have in mind Seneca's argument that poverty is not bad for us and that wealth is not good for us:

> I deny that riches are a good...[but] I admit that they are desirable... Hear, then, since we both agree that they are desirable, what reason I have for not including them in the number of goods...Place me in a house that is most sumptuous, place me where I may have gold and silver plate for common use; I shall not look up to myself on account of these things, which, even though they belong to me, are nevertheless no part of me. Take me to the Sublician Bridge and cast me among the beggars; nevertheless I shall not find reason to look down upon myself because I sit in the company of those who stretch out their hands for alms. For what difference does it make whether a man lacks a piece of bread when he does not lack the possibility of dying? And what is the conclusion? I prefer that gorgeous house to the Bridge! Place me in the midst of sumptuous furnishings and the trappings of luxury; I shall not think myself one whit happier because I have a soft mantle, because my guests recline on purple. Change my mattress; I shall be not a whit more wretched if my wearied neck must rest on a handful of hay, if I shall sleep on a cushion of the Circus with the stuffing spilling out through its patches of old cloth. ("On the Happy Life", 24-25)

This argument targets poverty and wealth, but presumably Seneca would follow the same argument form to establish that only virtue and vice are good and bad for us. As I reconstruct things, Seneca argues roughly as follows:

(1) Poverty does not ground merit for shame.[9]

(2) Something makes you a worse person only if it grounds merit for shame

So (3) Poverty does not make you a worse person

(4) Something is bad for you only if it makes you a worse person

So (5) Poverty is not bad for you

Assuming the conclusion is false, we have to reject a premise, and premise 4 is the most obvious candidate.[10] But notice that we can reject that premise, accept 1-3 and then embrace the general view that virtue and vice ground merit for forms of appraisal respect and disrespect that include shame. Interestingly, this seems to be what Kant recommends when discussing Stoic views in the *Critique of Practical Reason*:

> Thus one may always laugh at the Stoic who in the most intense pains of gout cried out: Pain, however you torment me I will still never admit that you are something evil (xaxov, malum)!; nevertheless, he was correct. He felt that the pain was an ill, and his cry betrayed that; but he had no cause whatever to grant that any evil attached to him because of it, for the pain did not in the least diminish the worth of his person but only the worth of his condition. A single lie of which he had been aware would have had to strike down his pride, but the pain served only as an occasion to raise it when he was aware that he had not incurred it by any wrongful action and thereby made himself deserving of punishment. (5:60)

My suggestion is that to charitably reconstruct traditional claims about virtue being a great good, we should start from the thesis that

> **Virtue Grounds Appraisal Respect**: Virtue has lexical priority when it comes questions about who merits appraisal respect and disrespect.[11] This includes emotions such as shame, pride, contempt, and admiration, attitudes such as self-esteem and self-respect, and reactive attitudes such as disappointment and anger.

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[9] I am using 'shame' as shorthand for looking down at one self, but I am open to this only covering some types of shame.

[10] But notice the interesting argument that results if we replace (4) with (4'): Something robs your life of the meaning necessary for it to be worth living only if it makes you a worse person.

[11] For the distinction between appraisal and recognition respect, see Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect"

In order to get from Virtue Grounds Appraisal Respect to a strong thesis about virtue's great value, we need to add some normative claim about the significance of meriting appraisal respect and disrespect. Here are two further premises that come to mind: (1) merited appraisal respect is a central ground for meaning in life and (2) facts about what merits appraisal respect and disrespect entail facts about what agents have sufficient or compelling reason to do. I will leave aside the meaning claim and focus on the one about reasons for action.

To illustrate the proposal that facts about merit for appraisal respect should loom large in an account of practical rationality and that this is important for ethical theory, consider the Rashid case mentioned earlier. It would be vicious of Rashid to mock his son's poor play on the soccer field and to thereby humiliate him in front of his friends. It would be shameful for him to treat his son that way. Even if Rashid were to humiliate his son in order to stop two other mean dads from humiliating their sons, his action would still be vicious and shameful. Moreover, I think we can now add that the fact that his action would still be vicious and shameful grounds a rational constraint on his action in this case: he should not humiliate his son to stop two other humiliations, and that is because that would be a vicious and shameful way to treat his son.

Now I am not going to pretend to fully develop and assess this thesis in the remaining space. But I do want to say something more general about how we might build on what I have suggested so far to set up a fruitful comparison between Kantian, Consequentialist, and Aristotelian ethical theories.

To begin, consider the three types of goods that Aristotle distinguishes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* - the noble, the advantageous, and the pleasant. Interpretation is always a contested, tricky business, but there is at least room to understand Aristotle's nobility (*ta kalon*) as a distinctively moral or ethical kind of goodness. On this reading, his example of a

virtuous man willingly sacrificing his life in order to protect his city can be understood as a case in which someone has compelling moral reason to choose the good of the city over his personal welfare or advantage. The fact that the activity will be virtuous and noble provides a compelling moral reason to brave the sacrifice. More generally, it seems that Aristotle thinks that true nobility is a great moral good which should structure our practical agency in something like the way that dignity structures the practical agency of a well motivated Kantian agent. In other words, it is tempting to think that Aristotle recognizes the distinction between welfare and moral goodness that Kant highlights in the *Second Critique* (right before the passage quoted above) and that Aristotle's account of nobility, and the virtue that grounds it, can be fruitfully compared to Kant's account of dignity, and the moral law or features of personhood that ground it. The idea would be that these support competing accounts of good moral motivation and the worth of actions that embody it.

Now regardless of whether my interpretive assumptions about Aristotle are warranted[12], I believe that this proposal is one that contemporary Aristotelians should take up. By setting Aristotelian accounts of the noble side by side with Kantian accounts of dignity, and by reading these as competing accounts of a kind of moral or ethical goodness that is distinct from both personal welfare and agent-neutral intrinsic goodness, we can fruitfully frame questions about whether Aristotle's theory needs deep revision.[13] In addition,

[12] Some think that *ta kalon* is neither ethical nor moral because it is quasi-aesthetic and our ability to instantiate it is subject to luck. More importantly, I think, there are doubts about *ta kalon* being moral because it is not infused with relational or second-personal normativity in the way that morality is. In my view, doubts of the latter sort are well founded.

[13] See Cokelet (2015). I think that to really make good on the idea that virtue as a special moral value that is great, Aristotelian need to add a theory of second-personal social morality and then replace Aristotle's conception of nobility with one that involves responsiveness to the demands of social moral norms. This complicates the account of merited appraisal respect but also allows us to explain why some aretaic constraints and permissions are genuinely moral and why they can confront us as demands.

I think we can better tackle questions about how Aristotelian virtue ethics can provide a third way between Consequentialism and Deontology.

To see why, think back to the Rashid case, in which he could humiliate his son to stop two humiliations. I think the Aristotelian should make three claims about this case. First, it would be vicious and base for Rashid to humiliate his son, even if his doing so will stop two other people from doing the same. Second, vice is morally bad and this badness ground the conclusion that Rashid has compelling reason to refrain from humiliating his son. Finally, third, the type of moral badness that grounds what we could call the aretaic constraint on Rashid's behavior, is different both from the type of intrinsic goodness that consequentialists take to be fundamental and from the types of moral goodness to which Kantians appeal to explain deontic constraints. So on this view, the appreciation of the great good of virtue and the great bad of vice should structure our deliberations and constrain our promotion of the best states of affairs, much as Kantians think that dignity (or the value of mutual recognition) should. Moreover, if my earlier comments about Hurka's charge of moral self-indulgence are compelling then we can say that a virtuous agent will self-consciously guided by aretaic constraints.

§5. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that Hurka's skepticism about virtue being a great moral good is unwarranted. First, I have argued that his negative claim about virtue's agent-neutral intrinsic value is false. Second, his own late discussion of agent-relative value gives us reason to reject his verbal view of the moral/non-moral value distinction and to hold onto the view that virtue has a substantive and special kind of moral value. Third, I have suggested that virtue is a great good in the sense that it grounds rational constraints and permissions and

that by understanding virtue's greatness in this way we can start to see how to fruitfully compare Kantian, Consequentialist, and Aristotelian moral theories. I have not, of course surveyed Hurka's numerous critical comments about extant Aristotelian theories or his more general attacks on virtue ethics, but I do believe that the view I have drawn attention to in the last section of my paper can stand fast in the face of his attack. Of course, defending that view is a task for another occasion.

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